

# Blease Makes a Statement

Tells of the Recent Election—Accepts Defeat, but says It was Not Accomplished in the Right Manner.

To My Friends and Supporters:

A due sense of gratitude and thanks to you for your confidence and support, as well as a feeling of propriety upon my part, impels me to make to you a statement, as briefly as I can, with regard to the late primary election for the United States senate.

As you know, two years ago I made the fight for reelection for governor without having any financial means to maintain any organized management in my behalf in that campaign, and had to rely entirely upon the voluntary expression of the will of the people in casting their votes at the polls.

I was opposed by the organized efforts and the resources of the bankers, manufacturers and corporations, with substantially the entire press of the state lined up against me with the determination to show neither fairness nor justice, nor to abate a single effort to misrepresent the true state of the campaign as it progressed, but on the contrary to distort and vilify me in every respect.

With this combination of press and capital against me, I received 72,043 votes, a lead of 5,495 over a man who had been elected from his early entrance into public life with the Tillmanite movement, and who had been trained as the candidate in whom the senior senator from South Carolina and the press placed all of their hope of defeating me. This gentleman had been speaker of the house of representatives, had been an associate justice upon the supreme bench, and had been chief justice up to the time he resigned for the purpose of carrying the standard of the trusts, capitalists, corporations, and the press, who had conspired with the determination at all events and under all circumstances to try to perpetuate their control over the politics of South Carolina, and select her state officers.

Immediately after that election it was announced by the partisan and unscrupulous majority of the state executive committee that there were frauds and wilful irregularities committed in the election which was held under their own management and auspices. I quietly then submitted to the indignities and injustice which were attempted to be perpetrated upon me and the majority of the people of the state.

There were cast in that election for state officers 140,757 votes. It was vehemently asserted by the newspapers and by the members of that executive committee who were trying to nullify that primary election, that there were not that many qualified white democratic voters in the state. The proceedings in the nature of a contest, which were inaugurated by my opponents, under the advice and auspices of the partisan, executive committee, however, showed conclusively, even by the one-sided and partial examination made there, that such charge was without foundation, and the contest resulted in a ridiculous farce.

There was evinced in the present election the greatest interest in any election held within the last twenty years or more, and yet the total number of votes cast for the office of United States senator, as reported by my opponents in control of the count, was only 132,801—about 8,000 less than were cast in the election of 1912.

The iniquitous and unfair rules passed by the state democratic convention of last May, which was entirely in control of my adversaries, were intended to disfranchise the uneducated but poor and honest white men who were supposed to be, and I believe were, to a very large extent, my friends and supporters.

Those rules made it not only difficult and inconvenient, but humiliating, for them to enroll their names upon the club lists to which they belonged. Yet there were enrolled upon the club lists of the state 154,311 qualified voters, as reported under the management of my opponents. Out of that number at the last primary the returning boards for the several counties, nearly all of whom were under the absolute control of my opponents, who did not permit or allow any representative or adherents of mine to be appointed or to engage in the conduct of this election, returned only 132,801 votes, being 21,510 votes less than the qualified voters enrolled and appearing upon the club lists. After such a campaign as we had, how is the absence of these votes to be accounted for? In two years' time many young men became entitled to vote, and in my opinion did vote. I ask, how can these results be explained? Certainly not by any action of my friends and supporters in counting the votes.

Any fair minded person desiring to know the truth cannot fail to recognize that there is something wrong. Examine the votes of Charleston, Columbia and other towns, and it is evident who controlled and obtained the votes of the blind tigers and the dispensary followers. With this vote I was tainted throughout the state by the law and order gang, and yet when the count came who was seen to have pocketed the vote?

The primary was intended for the free expression of the white Democratic voters' wishes as to who should be their candidate. It was intended to make easy and afford facility for the free expression of their will, and not intended to circumscribe their right, and certainly not substantially to destroy it. These rules and the machinery inaugurated under them and the effort given to them were intended to hamper and make inconvenient this expression of the will of the white Democrats, especially the very people that the party should have protected and aided in the exercise of their manhood suffrage. I was aware, at the beginning, of this purpose and intention upon the part of my opponents. I forecasted it upon all occasions—that the machinery of conducting this election was taken out of your hands, my adherents, friends and supporters, and placed wholly within the hands of my adversaries and bitter opponents.

While I believe and even know, no far is one could know, that I would receive a majority of the ballots cast for the office for which I was running, I insisted that, unless the vote which was cast was safeguarded and the true returns made, and a proper count had, that I would not be declared the nominee. I implored my friends to see that I have had from all sources that too much reliance

was placed upon perfect adversariness.

I felt no apprehension from any of the attacks made by the two men who came into the race and made their entire campaign one of abuse. Their position was peculiar.

They declared that Senator Smith was not entitled to be re-elected to the office of senator! that his claim for re-election, in the light of his actions in the senate, did not entitle him to succeed himself, and that his pretensions were without foundation. At the same time, if I was unfit, and Senator Smith was not fit, whom then should the people elect out of the four that were running? These two? It necessarily followed that one of these two should be elected, if they were right.

Could the people in one breath declare that Smith was not entitled by any action or service that he had rendered to the people to be again their senator, and yet vote for him? No, they had no confidence in these two men, and the result of the vote showed it. I did not recognize them as candidates, or worthy of notice as such. It was a question entirely between myself and Senator Smith, and three weeks before the election, who can say, after knowing the result of the meetings which we had in all parts of the state that I would not beat him in the race by what I then claimed—by 8,000 to 11,000 majority?

I do not shut my eyes to the fact, nor do I care to pass it over without acknowledging it as a fact, that the situation which was stirred up by the bankers and the manufacturers in the name of the cotton planters of this state, was seized upon by Senator Smith and his friends to persuade the farmers of the necessity of his election to the United States senate, to aid them in certain pretended anticipated actions that the administration of President Wilson would take in their behalf, and that the failure to elect him would be met with serious resentment by the administration, and harm and injury would result to the farmers.

Then, too, it was argued that those who were greedy for office would fail of obtaining appointment and enjoying the spoils which an administration could give and confer upon those who would cast their votes and use their influence in behalf of candidates who had obtained by servile actions and ready obedience the good will of the departments of the federal government.

I have no censure for the farmers of this state. I simply say they have been deluded and betrayed, and it will not be long before they recognize the fact and feel that they should have stood by me in this election and resisted this attempt to deceive them. But even with this change I still am doubtfully would have been elected had an honest count been made throughout the state, and an honest election held in two of the largest cities of the state.

As I have said, I feared nothing from the misrepresentations of the two would-be candidates. I paid very little attention to what they said. The record had been made up, and was accessible to all. Their principal cry was raised against the power vested in the governor by the constitution of the state to see that the laws are executed in mercy. Exercising this onerous but most obligatory duty, I have exercised mercy. I have endeavored to see that the laws of the state are not heartlessly and cruelly enforced, and I have followed, as any one who has the slightest knowledge upon the subject knows, the same principles now prevalent in most all of our states, which have abrogated the cruel and barbaric treatment of prisoners. And yet a candidate for the United States senate, obeying the duties of his office, exercising the mandates of humanity, has been "exposed" for the first time, I believe, for the exercise of a generous heart and a merciful nature, to criticism and unjust.

I do not recall at present any other instance except that of the Roman governor, who found no fault in Him of Divine Nature, and yet was compelled, by the clamors of the cruel and unmerciful, to pass a sentence which from that day to this, has been condemned in all Christ's lands. But, if I mistake not, none has been so vile as to charge the executive in the exercise of this merciful attribute, with which the constitution clothes him, with having been influenced by corrupt purpose or illegal gain. If I am mistaken, let me now demand that such wretch now make known his charge in any certain and specific way as, when I shall call for judicial investigation against him, that he may not by cowardly evasion attempt to escape the punishment which he justly deserves.

There was another matter which was ding-donged into the ears of the people, and which the public may now with calmness look at in its true light. The misrepresentations of me in this matter were vile, but York county, the home of the subject of this discussion, showed by her vote how she estimated the dirty charges made against me. I received in that county 2,654 votes; Jennings received 59; Pollock received 21 and Smith received 1905. As to the men making these charges, the estimate in which the people of his own county held him, and the estimate which they put upon the truthfulness of his charges, whatever they were, is seen by the vote which I received in his county, which was as follows: Chesterfield County—Blease, 1,336; Jennings, 28; Pollock, 413; Smith, 1,329.

The election has been declared. As the executive committee counted it, Senator Smith received 72,266, I received 56,913, Jennings received 2,268, Pollock received 1,364. I shall not be insincere in saying that this has been a fair count or a true result. I carefully considered before the meeting of the executive committee the condition which presented itself. I was unable without adequate funds to employ attorneys and pay for witnesses to conduct an extensive investigation or a recount, under a protest

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in this way, before a committee already pledged to defeat me.

I felt then, as I feel now, that the strife of the campaign, should and that it was my duty to lend my efforts to that result. It is better for me to be defeated than for my people to undergo months of factional fight, criminalization and recrimination, and an expense of the manner in which these ballot boxes have been handled. I acquiesce in the election, I shall vote for Senator Smith. But I now assert that it is manifest that the primary system as conducted in 1912 and in 1914 by the people who have been in charge of its management cannot survive—that it cannot survive unless those iniquitous, unjust and unfair rules shall be repealed, unless those whom they approbriously call the "lower order" in our state be encouraged to vote in the primary instead of being deterred; unless they be fairly treated, and honest men be found to conduct the counting of the ballots cast at the polls, and honest men to see that such an honest count is properly tabulated by the state executive committee.

I deem it a pride that I have always maintained that the primary system is the one that we should uphold and keep. I have never and will not now raise my hand or voice to defeat its present results. But I warn the people of South Carolina that the patience of the true majority of the manhood of South Carolina will very little longer stand the treatment which they have received.

To you, my friends, I have said that my political ambition was gratified four years ago. I have never had any special desire of any further advancement in political life, except to serve those whose opinions, whose rights and interests I represent, and by whom I have stood through storm and sunshine. They say that Bleaseism is dead. Blease is defeated for the office that he ran for, in the manner above described, but Bleaseism is not dead.

What is Bleaseism? Every message that I have sent to the legislatures since I have been governor, which bodies were under the control of my opponents, has been in the interest and for the betterment of the poorer classes of our people, and the adjustment upon equity and fairness of the rights between them and their richer and more fortunate fellows.

I have as governor maintained the rights of the poor man to an equality with those of the rich man, in the exercise of all the duties and obligations in the life of the citizen. I have worked and struggled for the poor white man of South Carolina shall have the same voice in government as the rich man; as the banker, the capitalist, the president of the mill, and the railroad officers; that when it comes to voting for office, that the section man and railroad operative, who toils day by day for the support of his family, shall have the same right to vote for whomsoever he pleases as the president of the road, who rides in his private car, surrounded by his subordinates obeying his beck and call; that the clerk in the banking house, when he goes to the polls to cast his vote, shall be as unimpeded in his choice as to who shall govern him, as the president of the bank who touches his bells and rings into his presence the out-door messenger, or in-door clerk; and that the mill operatives who toil by day and by night shall have proper protection against the undue influence of officers and owners of mills.

Now, what has anti-Bleaseism been? Look at the records of the legislatures. Did they initiate any laws for the poor man? Has anything been passed which can be otherwise known than as oppression of the masses and the protection of the rich and of capital? Have they seen that the corporations of this state have fulfilled even the statutory requirements in their conduct towards the public? Have they seen that freight rates and passenger rates and freight accommodations and passenger accommodations have been carried out?

I know of no such laws. Anti-Bleaseism is therefore nothing but the perpetuation of the rule of the corporations and the rich over the poor; the denial of salutary laws for the health, safety and protection of those who cannot protect themselves. It is the indignation of the press against any interference with their opinions or with their recommendations of candidates for office, or their control of the creature whom they have helped put in office.

These are the forces I have fought. These are the forces I will continue to fight, whether I bear the standard of the people that I represent, or whether I stand as an humble helper in advancing their cause. The truth of this situation, like all other truths, will at last prevail. As for my future, I shall endeavor, like those whom I have loved, whom I have fought for, whom I have represented, to make a living out of my profession, or as best I can. But whatever be my fortune, I say to you, my friends and supporters, I thank you for the favor you have shown me; I thank

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